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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to improve student preparedness for entry into transfer-level freshman English composition, the English department of Long Beach City College (California) inaugurated a new program to improve writing skills. In the past, students who demonstrated a deficiency in their command of English usage, by low achievement on a standardized English placement test, had to satisfactorily complete a course reviewing English essentials before enrolling in transfer-level freshman English composition. The new program fulfills the review course requirement but emphasis is placed on writing compositions rather than upon reviewing English grammar, punctuation, and fundamentals. Small discussion groups, and auto-tutorial instructional programs are used to assist students in correcting errors that hinder effective written communication. It was judged that the program's effectiveness should be evaluated before its regular adoption by the college. Use of "t" tests for means and proportions were employed to seek out pertinent significant differences between the new program and the existing traditional one. Data analysis revealed no significant differences between the two groups (.05 level) as to achievement grades, penalty grades, and Cooperative English Expression Test scores following completion of the programs. (AL)

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LONG BEACH CITY COLLEGE

April, 1972

AN EVALUATION OF AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO ENGLISH COMPOSITION INSTRUCTION

Phase One

JC 720 118

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Evaluation of an Innovative Approach to English Composition Instruction

Introduction. In an attempt to improve student preparedness for entry into transfer level Freshman English Composition, the English Department of Long Beach City College, during the current school year, inaugurated a new program to improve writing skills. For lack of a better name, this course will be identified as English 150 "TBA" throughout this report. As in the past, those students who demonstrate a deficiency in their command of English usage, by low achievement on a standardized English placement test, must satisfactorily complete a course reviewing English essentials before enrolling in transfer-level Freshman English Composition. In the new program emphasis is placed on writing compositions rather than upon reviewing English grammar, punctuation, and fundamentals. Small discussion groups, fifteen students maximum size, and auto-tutorial instruction programs available in a language laboratory center are designed to assist the student to correct those writing errors which stand in the way of effective communication. The heart of the course is the small discussion group which meets twice weekly for fifty minute sessions, and provides the stimulus and audience for the student's compositions. Students are expected to use the language lab at least one hour per week to correct the errors in grammar, punctuation, or mechanics that have been detected in their written papers.

Certain advantages seem immediately apparent in the new English program. For example, with fewer students per class more individual instruction is possible. Through the use of auto-tutorial programs in the language laboratory, each student may proceed at his own pace to

correct errors in written communication. It was the judgment of the English department, however, that the effectiveness of this program should be evaluated objectively before it was recommended for regular adoption by the college.

The purpose of this investigation was to discover what effect, if any, an innovative approach to English Composition instruction has had upon the students enrolled in the program. Mean test score on a standardized English usage test; course grades, e.g., achievement (A, B, C, Cr.) and penalty (D, F, NCr.); and course withdrawal rate were chosen as criterion variables to provide objective measures of the effectiveness of the new course. It was decided to obtain similar data for the traditional three hour lecture course (English 150 "Traditional") in order to provide benchmarks for comparison. Stated in the form of null hypotheses, the following hypotheses were tested in the course of this investigation:

1. As measured by a standardized English usage test score administered at the end of the semester, there is no statistically significant* difference in student performance between students in English 150 "TBA" and English 150 "Traditional".

2. As indicated by the proportion of subject achievement grades (A, B, C, Cr.), there is no statistically significant* difference in student performance between students in English 150 "TBA" and English 150 "Traditional".

3. As indicated by the proportion of subject penalty grades (D, F, NCr.), there is no statistically significant* difference in student performance between students in English 150 "TBA" and English 150 "Traditional".

4. As indicated by the proportion of students who withdraw from the program, there is no statistically significant* difference in student performance between English 150 "TBA" and English 150 "Traditional".

Procedure. Students enrolled in classes pertaining to remedial English instruction provided two comparable groups for this evaluational study. From the twenty day-time sections devoted to the new program, a fifty-percent sampling was obtained to form a representative sample of English 150 "TBA" students. This was accomplished by selecting every other "TBA"

*P=.05

section, beginning with the second section on a sequential listing. All students enrolled in each of the selected sections were included in the sample group. To obtain a comparable group, representative of students registered in the English 150 "Traditional" program, five sections were randomly selected and the students enrolled in these sections formed the sample group. Random selection of the sections was achieved by identifying numerically each daytime section of traditional English 150, and determining from a Table of Random Digits the five numbers to be included to form a randomized sample. From the selected class sections, the names of 153 students were identified for the English "TBA" group, and 146 names for the English 150 "Traditional" control group.

Both groups of English composition students were reduced in size after the students' personnel folders were obtained and specific demographic data were recorded. The demographic data collected consisted of the following information: birthdate, sex, high school grade point average, high school English grades and test scores from Form 1A of the School and College Ability Test, and the Cooperative English Expression Test. Students for whom these data were not available were removed from the sample groups. Also excluded from the study were those students who withdrew from class during the first week of the Fall semester. As a result, the number of students in each sample group was reduced in size:

English 150 "TBA"	115 students in sample
English 150 "Traditional"	100 students in sample.

After recording for the two sample groups the demographic data obtained from student personnel folders, these data were tabulated to obtain frequency distributions. Means and standard deviations, or in some instances percentages, were calculated for each item. The differences

between the two groups were tested for significance, using the "t" Test for means, or "t" Test for proportions. Table 1 summarizes these demographic data.

In addition to the demographic data recorded for each student, other data were required to test the null hypotheses formulated for this study. Each student in the two control groups, who was still active in his English class, completed Form 1B of the Cooperative English Test during the last week of the Fall semester. The resulting test scores were tabulated into a frequency distribution, and group means and standard deviations were calculated. Table 3 summarizes these data. Final course grades were recorded for each student identified and included in this study. These grades were then tabulated into four major categories: Achievement grades (A, B, C, Cr.), Penalty grades (D, F, NCr.), Incomplete grades (I), and Withdrawal grades (W). Percentages were then calculated for each category. Observed differences between the two student groups were tested statistically with the appropriate "t" Test for significance at the 5 percent level.

Findings: The comparability and performance of two representative groups of English composition students involved in this evaluational study, and the resulting statistical data are summarized in a series of three tables appended to this report. The statements that follow are based on these data:

1. The two groups of students selected for this study as representative samples from English 150 "Traditional" and English 150 "TBA" were not statistically different in the characteristics by which they were compared (Table 1).

2. When compared to students in the "Traditional" English program, students in the English 150 "TBA" program earned a lower percentage of penalty grades (D, F, NCr.), and a lower percentage of achievement grades (A, B, C, Cr.). On the other hand, these same students received a higher percentage of both withdrawal grades and incomplete grades (Table 2).

3. Although there are observable differences in course grade patterns for these two student groups, no statistically significant difference (.05 level) was found to exist.

4. As a group, students enrolled in the English 150 "TBA" program achieved a lower score than a comparable group of students in "Traditional" English 150 when retested at the end of the semester using Form 1B of the Cooperative English Expression Test (Table 3).

5. The difference between mean raw scores from the retest of the Cooperative English Expression Test, Form 1B, did not prove to be statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

6. None of the stated null hypotheses was rejectable on the basis of the collected and calculated data; all were acceptable as written, or true.

Conclusions and Discussion. Some semblance of credibility is provided for the following statements by the data generated in this study:

1. The two selected student groups possessed certain comparable characteristics. Their academic ability, as measured by Form 1A, of the School and College Ability Test, for example, was not significantly different. Their past academic achievement, as measured by high school GPA, high school English grade point average, or the Cooperative English Expression Test, Form 1A, was almost identical for each variable. Average age for the two student groups was practically identical. In only one area was there a difference suspected of being statistically significant, i.e., the proportions of female and male students. This difference, however, when subjected to analysis using a "t" test for proportions, was not statistically significant. It is assumed, therefore, that the findings of this investigation are not unduly contaminated by a dissimilarity in student groupings.

2. A cursory glance at the data from this study may suggest that students in the English "TBA" group did not fare as well as students in the "Traditional" English groups when comparisons were made on the basis

of the criterion variables. Students from the English "TBA" program, for example, earned a slightly lower percentage of both achievement grades (A, B, C, Cr.), and penalty grades (D, F, NCr.). These same students demonstrated a greater propensity to withdraw from the program. And, as a group, "TBA" students achieved lower scores on a standardized English achievement test, administered at the end of the semester, than their counterpart in English 150 "Traditional". When these differences were subjected to statistical analysis, however, the differences in performance were not statistically significant. The conclusion to be inferred, therefore, is that both the new English "TBA" program and the "Traditional" approach to remedial English composition instruction are equally effective according to the criterion variables defined for this phase of the study.

3. Whether students in either group actually learned to write better compositions remains to be shown. Some data have already been collected, and plans have been formulated to collect additional data, in an effort to provide information concerning the students' actual writing skills. Another variable--comparative course cost--should also be investigated in the second phase of this study. If both courses are equally effective, in this age of inflation and shrinking educational funds, the least expensive program must be the program pursued.

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Table 1

Some Characteristics of Two Groups of English Composition Students, LBCC

Characteristics	Group Traditional (N=100)	TBA (N=115)	Diff.	"t"*
Average Age	20.9	21.0	+0.1	
Sex: Male	60.0%	52.2%	-7.8	1.01
Female	40.0	47.8%	+7.8	
Average High School GPA	2.40	2.44	+0.04	0.50
Average High School English GPA	2.19	2.19	-0-	0.02
Test Data (Mean Raw Score): School and College Ability Test Form 1A, Total	52.70	50.35	-2.35	1.38
Cooperative English Expression Test, Form 1A (Pretest)	35.30	34.50	-0.80	0.80

*None of the differences tested was significant at the .05 level.

Table 2

Comparison of Final Subject Grades for Two Groups of English Composition Students, LBCC

Final Grades	Group Traditional No.	%	TBA No.	%	Diff.	"t"*
Achievement grades (A,B,C,Cr.)	64	64.0%	65	56.5%	-7.5%	0.93
Penalty grades (D,F,NCr.)	15	15.0	9	7.8	-7.2	1.45
Incomplete grade (I)	-0-	-0-	9	7.8	+7.8	
Withdrawal grades (W)	21	21.0	32	27.9	+6.9	1.00
Totals	100	100.0%	115	100.0%		

* None of the differences tested was significant at the .05 level.

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Table 3

Comparison of Test Data From the Cooperative English Expression Test, Form 1B, Administered to two Groups of LBCC English Composition Students During Final Week of the Semester

Test Data	Group Traditional	TBA	Diff.	"t"
Mean Raw Score	36.42	34.16	-2.26	1.70*
Standard Deviation	7.86	7.94		
Number tested	77	65		

* Not significant at the .05 level.